

Study Shows Most People Are Spreading Dangerous Bacteria Around the Kitchen and Don't Even Realize It

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WASHINGTON, June 28, 2018 – A new study from the U.S. Department of Agriculture shows that when it comes to handwashing before meals, consumers are failing to properly clean their hands 97 percent of the time. Rushed handwashing can lead to cross-contamination of food and other surfaces, resulting in foodborne illness.

“As a mother of three young children, I am very familiar with the mad dash families go through to put dinner on the table,” said Carmen Rottenberg, Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Food Safety at USDA. “You can’t see, smell or feel bacteria. By simply washing your hands properly, you can protect your family and prevent that bacteria from contaminating your food and key areas in your kitchen.”

The preliminary results of the observational study, conducted by USDA in collaboration with RTI International and North Carolina State University, showed some concerning results.

- Handwashing: the study revealed that consumers are not washing their hands correctly 97 percent of the time.
 - Most consumers failed to wash their hands for the necessary 20 seconds, and
 - Numerous participants did not dry their hands with a clean towel.
- Thermometer use: results reveal that only 34 percent of participants used a food thermometer to check that their burgers were cooked properly.
 - Of those who did use the food thermometer, nearly half still did not cook the burgers to the safe minimum internal temperature.

- Cross contamination: the study showed participants spreading bacteria from raw poultry onto other surfaces and food items in the test kitchen.
 - 48 percent of the time are contaminating spice containers used while preparing burgers,
 - 11 percent of the time are spreading bacteria to refrigerator handles, and
 - 5 percent of the time are tainting salads due to cross-contamination.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 48 million Americans are sickened with foodborne illnesses each year, resulting in roughly 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths. Children, older adults and those with compromised immune systems are especially at risk.

With grilling season upon us, USDA is reminding consumers to use a food thermometer and cook meat and poultry products to the recommended safe internal temperatures. When cooking meat and poultry patties, insert the thermometer through the side of the patty until the probe reaches the center of the patty. Meat and poultry products are done when they reach these minimum internal temperatures:

- Beef, pork, lamb and veal (steaks, roasts and chops): 145°F.
- Ground meats (burgers): 160°F.
- Poultry (whole or ground): 165°F.

Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling raw meat, poultry or eggs. Make sure you are washing for a full 20 seconds, and always dry your hands on a clean towel.

More information about this study is available in an [executive summary](#).

Have questions? Need more food safety information? Call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MP-HOTLINE (1-888-674-6854). Live food safety experts are available Monday through Friday, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Eastern Time. Expert advice is also available 24/7 at [AskKaren.gov](#).